

Video Address by Mr. James Wolfenson

President, World Bank

Good morning. Let me say how grateful I am to have been invited by my friend Mr. Tadeo Chino to participate in this Poverty Forum and to recognize once again the strength of our partnership with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and our enormous regard for both the leadership of Mr. Chino and for the steps that ADB is taking in combating and confronting the issues of growth and poverty in the Asian region. I am very happy to say that we have in the past been able to cooperate very strongly with ADB and look forward to doing so in the future. The ADB Forum and the Manila Social Forum that we had in Manila are examples of our continuing association; indeed today we will be publishing the proceedings of the Manila Social Forum in a form that will allow both the broader distribution of those ideas and a discussion of the proceedings themselves.

What I am impressed by most particularly, in terms of the approach that is being taken by ADB, is the focus that its management has brought to the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis. Being on the spot in Asia, they have the opportunity to look first hand at the issues of poverty alleviation and they have determined, as indeed have we, that it is not money alone that can deal with the questions of poverty: we already start with the issues of inequity in many of the countries in the region; the differences between the rich and the poor are increasing, not diminishing, in too many countries. I think we are united in the conclusion that trying to deal with the questions of poverty requires a comprehensive approach that must address the issues of strengthening governance, strengthening financial systems, and dealing with the evident questions of corruption that prevail in too many places in our world. Those structural issues are linked, of course, with the social issues, the issues of providing safety nets, of giving opportunities to more people, of better programs in education and health care; and of course all these are associated with the strengthening of infrastructure.

We are as concerned as ADB with the issues of changing demography. As we look at the question of poverty, we all know that two thirds of the people in poverty live in the Asian region—East Asia, South Asia, and Central Asia—and we know that the challenge for us in the context of development goals that has been agreed by the community of nations—to halve the percentage of world poverty by 2015—will only be met if we are successful in Asia. That is very clear just by the numbers, but Asia also reflects the other demographics, with greater concentrations of people coming in the next years, the next 25 years in which we will see 2 billion people added to our planet, moving us from 6 billion to 8 billion, with

the largest number of those coming in Asia. And of course in addition to those 2 billion that are coming on to our planet, 2 billion of them will be moving into cities and towns.

So we have very, very special challenges that we have to face together: challenges of a comprehensive approach to development, challenges that recognize that we must first and foremost have growth; but in addition to growth, we must have not only financial resources, but must deal with the questions of structural and social issues on an equally urgent basis. This is the message which my friend Chino has been looking at. It is the basis of the discussion, which I know you will be having in this meeting. None of us here feels that we have the answer. We know that by dialogue with people who are interested in these concerns, we have a chance together at partnership to try and make a difference in what happens in terms of social equity, social justice, and poverty reduction. These issues are not just issues in economics. They are issues of individual people, of individual lives, of older people, of younger people, people who live and breathe and suffer and have joys like all of us. It is a human issue, but it is also an issue in a broader sense, not just of poverty but of peace. Unless we can deal with the question of poverty, there will be no peace on our planet in the next 25 years. So your discussions today are very important. I look forward to learning of your conclusions and your ideas, and I thank you very much for inviting me to say a few words at the beginning of this important meeting.